

Liber LIX

ACROSS THE GULF

CHAPTER I

AT last the matter comes back into my mind.

It is now five years since I discovered my "stele" at Bulak, but not until I obtained certain initiation in the city of Benares last year did the memory of my life in the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty when I was prince and priest in Thebai begin to return. Even now much is obscure; but I am commanded to write, so that in writing the full memory may be recovered. For without the perfect knowledge and understanding of that strange life by Nilus I cannot fully know and understand this later life, or find that Tomb which I am appointed to find, and do that therein which must be done.

Therefore with faith and confidence do I who was -- in a certain mystical sense -- the Priest of the Princes, Ankh-f-na-khonsu, child of Ta-nech, the holy and mighty one, and of Bes-na-Maut, priestess of the Starry One, set myself to tell myself the strange things that befell me in that life.

Thus.

At my birth Aphruimis in the sign of the Lion was ascending, and in it that strange hidden planet that presides over darkness and magic and forbidden love. The sun was united with the planet of Amoun, but in the Abyss, as showing that my power and glory should be secret, and in Aterechinis the second decanate of the House of Maat, so that my passion and pleasure should likewise be unprofance. In the House of Travel in the Sign of the Ram was the Moon my sweet lady. And the wise men interpreted this as a token that I should travel afar; it might be to the great temple at the source of mother Nile; it might be ...

Foolishness! I have scarce stirred from Thebai.

Yet have I explored strange countries that they knew not of: and of this also will I tell in due course.

I remember -- as I never could while I lived in Khemi-land -- all the minute care of my birth. For my mother was of the oldest house in Thebes, her blood not only royal, but mixed with the divine. Fifty virgins in their silver tissue stood about her shaking their sistrans, as if the laughter of the Gods echoed the cries of the woman. By the bed stood the Priest of Horus with his heavy staff, the Phoenix for its head, the prong for its foot. Watchful he stood lest Sebek should rise from the abyss.

On the roof of the palace watched the three chief astrologers of Pharaoh with their instruments, and four armed men from the corners of the tower announced each god as it rose. So these three men ached and sweated at their task; for they had become most anxious. All day my birth had been expected; but as Toun drew to His setting their faces grew paler than the sky; for there was one dread moment in the night which all their art had failed to judge. The gods that watched over it were veiled.

But it seemed unlikely that Fate would so decide; yet so they feared that they sent down to the priest of Thoth to say that he must at all costs avoid the threatening moment, even if the lives of mother and child should pay for it; and still the watchmen cried the hour. Now, now! cried the oldest of the astrologers as the moment grew near -- now! Below in answer the priest of Thoth summoned all his skill.

When lo! a rumbling of the abyss. The palace reeled and fell; Typhon rose mighty in destruction, striding across the skies. The world rocked with earthquake; every star broke from its fastening and trembled.

And in the midst lo! Bes-na-Maut my mother; and in her arms myself, laughing in the midst of all that ruin. Yet not one living creature took the slightest hurt! But the astrologers rent their robes and beat their faces on the ground; for the dread moment, the Unknown Terror, had gone by; and with it I had come to light.

In their terror, indeed, as I learnt long after, they sent messengers to the oldest and wisest of the priests; the High-priest of Nuit, who lived at the bottom of a very deep well, so that his eyes, even by day, should remain fixed upon the stars.

But he answered them that since they had done all that they could, and Fate had reversed their design, it was evident that the matter was in the hands of Fate, and that the less they meddled the better it would be for them. For he was a brusque old man -- how afterwards I met him shall be written in its place.

So then I was to be brought up as befitted one in my station, half-prince, half-priest. I was to follow my father, hold his wand and ankh, assume his throne.

And now I begin to recall some details of my preparation for that high and holy task.

Memory is strangely fragmentary and strangely vivid. I remember how, when I had completed my fourth month, the priests took me and wrapped me in a panther's skin, whose flaming gold and jet-black spots were like the sun. They carried me to the river bank where the holy crocodiles were basking; and there they laid me. But when they left me they refrained from the usual enchantment against the evil spirit of the crocodile; and so for three days I lay without protection. Only at certain hours did my mother descend to feed me; and she too was silent, being dressed as a princess only, without the sacred badges of her office.

Also in the sixth month they exposed me to the Sun in the desert where was no shade or clothing; and in the seventh month they laid me in a bed with a sorceress, that fed on the blood of young children, and, having been in prison for a long time, was bitterly an-hungered; and in the eighth month they gave me the aspic of Nile, and the royal Uraeus serpent, and the deadly snake of the south country, for playmates; but I passed scatheless through all these trials.

And in the ninth month I was weaned, and my mother bade me farewell, for never again might she look upon my face, save in the secret rites of the Gods, when we should meet otherwise than as babe and mother, in the garment of that Second Birth which we of Khemi knew.

The next six years of my life have utterly faded. All that I can recall is the vision of the greatness of our city of Thebai, and the severity of my life. For I lived on the back of a horse, even eating and drinking as I rode; for so it becometh a prince. Also I was trained to lay about me with a sword, and in the use of the bow and the spear. For it was said that Horus -- or Men Tu, as we called him in Thebai -- was my Father and my God. I shall speak later of that strange story of my begetting.

At the end of seven years, however, so great and strong had I waxen that my father took me to the old astrologer that dwelt in the well to consult him. This I remember as if it were but yesterday. The journey down the great river with its slow days! The creaking benches and the sweat of the slaves are still in my ears and my nostrils. Then swift moments of flying foam in some rapid or cataract. The great temples that we passed; the solitary Ibis of Thoth that meditated on the shore; the crimson flights of birds; -- but nothing that we saw upon the journey was like unto the end thereof. For in a desolate place was the Well, with but a small temple beside it, where the servants -- they too most holy! of that holy ancient man might dwell.

And my father brought me to the mouth of the well and called thrice upon the name of Nuit. Then came a voice climbing and coiling up the walls like a serpent, "Let this child become priestess of the Veiled One!"

Now my father was wise enough to know that the old man never made a mistake; it was only a question of a right interpretation of the oracle. Yet he was sorely puzzled and distressed, for that I was a boy child. So at the risk of his life -- for the old man was brusque! -- he called again and said "Behold my son!"

But as he spoke a shaft of sunlight smote him on the nape of the neck as he bend over the well; and his face blackened, and his blood gushed forth from his mouth. And the old man lapped up the blood of my father with his tongue, and cried gleefully to his servants to carry me to a house of the Veiled One, there to be trained in my new life.

So there came forth from the little house an eunuch and a young woman exceeding fair; and the eunuch saddled two horses, and we rode into the desert alone.

Now though I could ride like a man, they suffered me not; but the young priestess bore me in her arms. And though I ate meat like a warrior, they suffered me not, but the young priestess fed me at her breast.

And they took from me the armour of gilded bronze that my father had made for me, scales like a crocodile's sewn upon crocodile skin that cunning men had cured with salt and spices; but they wrapped me in soft green silk.

So strangely we came to a little house in the desert, and that which befell me there is not given me of the gods at this time to tell; but I will sleep; and in the morning by their favour the memory thereof shall arise in me, even in me across these thousands of years of the whirling of the earth in her course.

CHAPTER II

SO for many years I grew sleek and subtle in my woman's attire. And the old eunuch (who was very wise) instructed me in the Art of Magic and in the worship of the Veiled One, whose priestess was I destined.

I remember now many things concerning those strange rituals, things too sacred to write. But I will tell of an adventure that I had when I was nine years of age.

In one of the sacred books it is written that the secret of that subtle draught which giveth vision of the star-abodes of Duant, whose sight is life eternal in freedom and pleasure among the living, lieth in the use of a certain little secret bone that is in the Bear of Syria. Yet how should I a child slay such an one? For they had taken all weapons from me.

But in a garden of the city (for we had now returned unto a house in the suburbs of Thebai) was a colony of bears kept by a great lord for his pleasure. And I by my cunning enticed a young bear-cub from its dam, and slew it with a great stone. Then I tore off its skin and hid myself therein, taking also its jaw and sharpening the same upon my stone. Then at last the old she-bear came searching me, and as she put down her nose to smell at me, taking me for her cub, I drove my sharpened bone into her throat.

I struck with great fortune; for she coughed once, and died.

Then I took her skin with great labour; and (for it was now night) began to return to my house. But I was utterly weary and I could no longer climb the wall. Yet I stayed awake all that night, sharpening again upon my stone the jaw-bone of that bear-cub; and this time I bound it to a bough that I tore off from a certain tree that grew in the garden.

Now towards the morning I fell asleep, wrapped in the skin of the old she-bear. And the great bear himself, the lord of the garden, saw me, and took me for his mate, and came to take his pleasure of me. Then I being roused out of sleep struck at his heart with all my strength as he rose over me, and quitting my shelter ran among the trees. For I struck not home, or struck aslant. And the old bear, sore wounded, tore up the skin of his mate; and then, discovering the cheat, came after me.

But by good fortune I found and wedged myself into a narrow pylon, too deep for him to reach me, though I could not go through, for the door was closed upon me. And in the angle of the door was an old sword disused. This was too heavy for me to wield with ease; yet I lifted it, and struck feebly at the claws of the bear. So much I wounded him that in his pain he dropped and withdrew and began to lick his paws. Thus he forgot about me; and I, growing bolder, ran out upon him. He opened his mouth; but before he could rise, I thrust the sword down it. He tossed his head; and I, clinging to the sword-hilt, was thrown into the air, and fell heavily upon my shoulder. My head too struck the ground; and I lay stunned.

When I came to myself it was that a party of men and women had thrown water in my face and uttered the spells that revive from swoon. Beside me, close beside me, lay mine enemy dead; and I, not forgetful of my quest, took the blade of the sword (for it was snapped) and cut off the secret parts of the bear and took the little bone thereof; and would have gone forth with my prize. But the great lord of the house spake with me; and all his friends made as if to mock at me. But the women would not have it; they came round me and petted and caressed me; so that angry words were spoken.

But even as they quarrelled among themselves, my guardian, the old eunuch, appeared among them; for he had traced me to the garden.

And when they beheld the ring of the holy ancient man the astrologer they trembled; and the lord of the house threw a chain of gold around my neck, while his lady gave me her own silken scarf, brodered with the loves of Isis and Nephthys, and of Apis and Hathor. Nor did any dare to take from me the little bone that I had won so dearly; and with it I made the spell of the Elixir, and beheld the starry abodes of Duat, even as it was written in the old wise book.

But my guardians were ashamed and perplexed; for though I was so sleek and subtle, yet my manhood already glowed in such deeds as this -- how should I truly become the priestess of the Veiled One?

Therefore they kept me closer and nursed me with luxury and flattery. I had two negro slave-boys that fanned me and that fed me; I had an harp-player from the great city of Memphis, that played languorous tunes. But in my mischief I would constantly excite him to thoughts of war and of love; and his music would grow violent and loud, so that the old eunuch, rushing in, would belabour him with his staff.

How well I recall that room! Large was it and lofty; and there were sculptured pillars of malachite and lapis-lazuli and of porphyry and yellow marble. The floor was of black granite; the roof of white marble. On the Southern side was my couch, a softness of exotic furs. To roll in them was to gasp for pleasure. In the centre was a tiny fountain of pure gold. The sunlight came through the space between the walls and the roof, while on the other sides I could look through and up into the infinite blue.

There was a great python that inhabited the hall; but he was very old, and too wise to stir. But -- so I then believed -- he watched me and conveyed intelligence to the old magus of the well.

Now then the folly of my guardians appeared in this; that while all day I slept and languished and played idly, at night while they supposed I slept, I slept not. But I rose and gave myself to the most violent exercises. First, I would go into my bathing-pool and hold my breath beneath the water while I invoked the goddess Auramoth one hundred times. Next, I would walk on my hands around the room; I even succeeded in hopping on one hand. Next, I would climb each of the twenty-four smooth pillars. Next, I would practise the seventy-two athletic postures. Also in many other ways I would strive to make my strength exceeding great; and all this I kept most secret from my guardians.

At last on one night I resolved to try my strength; so, pushing aside the curtain, I passed into the corridor. Springing upon the soldier that guarded me, I brought him to the ground; and with my right hand under his chin, my left on his right shoulder, and my knee at the nape of his neck, I tore his head from his body before he could utter a cry.

I was now in my fifteenth year; but the deed was marvelous. None suspected me; it was thought a miracle.

The old eunuch, distressed, went to consult the magus of the well; whose answer was; "Let the vows of the priestess be taken!"

Now I thought this old man most foolish-obstinate; for I myself was obstinate and foolish. Not yet did I at all understand his wisdom or his purpose.

It often happens thus. Of old, men sent their priests to rebuke Nile for rising -- until it was known that his rising was the cause of the fertility of their fields.

Now of the vows which I took upon me and of my service as priestess of the Veiled One it shall next be related.

CHAPTER III

IT was the Equinox of Spring, and all my life stirred in me. They led me down cool colonnades of mighty stone clad in robes of white brodered with silver, and veiled with a veil of fine gold web fastened with rubies. They gave me not the Uraeus crown, nor any nemyss, nor the Ateph crown, but bound my forehead with a simple fillet of green leaves -- vervain and mandrake and certain deadly herbs of which it is not fitting to speak.

Now the priests of the Veiled One were sore perplexed, for that never before had any boy been chosen priestess. For before the vows may be administered, the proofs of virginity are sought; and, as it seemed, this part of the ritual must be suppressed or glossed over. Then said the High Priest: "Let it be that we examine the first woman that he shall touch with his hand, and she shall suffice." Now when I heard this, I thought to test the God; and, spying in the crowd, I beheld in loose robes with flushed face and wanton eyes, a certain courtesan well-known in the city, and I touched her. Then those of the priests that hated me were glad, for they wished to reject me; and taking aside into the hall of trial that woman, made the enquiry.

Then with robes rent they came running forth, crying out against the Veiled One; for they found her perfect in virginity, and so was she even unto her death, as latter appeared. {306}

But the Veiled One was wroth with them because of this, and appeared in her glittering veil upon the steps of her temple. There she stood, and called them one by one; and she lifted but the eye-piece of her veil and looked into their eyes; and dead they fell before her as if smitten of the lightning.

But those priests who were friendly to me and loyal to the goddess took that virgin courtesan, and led her in triumph through the city, veiled and crowned as is befitting. Now after some days he that guarded the sacred goat of Khem died, and they appointed her in his place. And she was the first woman that was thus honoured since the days of the Evil Queen in the Eighteenth Dynasty, of her that wearied of men at an age when other women have not known them, that gave herself to gods and beasts.

But now they took me to the pool of liquid silver -- or so they called it; I suppose it was quicksilver; for I remember that it was very difficult to immerse me -- which is beneath the feet of the Veiled One. For this is the secret of the Oracle. Standing afar off the priest beholds the reflection of her in the mirror, seeing her lips that move under the veil; and this he interprets to the seeker after truth.

Thus the priest reads wrongly the silence of the Goddess, and the seeker understands ill the speech of the priest. Then come forth fools, saying "The Goddess hath lied" -- and in their folly they die.

While, therefore, they held me beneath the surface of the pool, the High Priestess took the vows on my behalf saying:

I swear by the orb of the Moon;

I swear by the circuit of the Stars;

I swear by the Veil, and by the Face behind the Veil;

I swear by the Light Invisible, and by the Visible Darkness; On behalf of this Virgin that is buried in thy water;

To live in purity and service;

To love in beauty and truth;

To guard the Veil from the profane;

To die before the Veil; ... -- and then came the awful penalty of failure.

I dare not recall half of it; yet in it were these words: Let her be torn by the Phallus of Set, and let her bowels be devoured by Apep; let her be prostituted to the lust of Besz, and let her face be eaten by the god ----.

It is not good to write His name.

Then they loosed me, and I lay smiling in the pool. They lifted me up and brought me to the feet of the goddess, so that I might kiss them. And as I kissed them such a thrill ran through me that I thought myself rapt away into the heaven of Amoun, or even as Asi when Hoor and Hoor-pa-kraat, cleaving her womb, sprang armed to life. Then they stripped me of my robes, and lashed me with fine twigs of virgin hazel, until my blood ran from me into the pool. But the surface of the silver swallowed up the blood by some mysterious energy; and they took this to be a sign of acceptance. So then they clothed me in the right robes of a priestess of the Veiled One; and they put a silver sistron in my hand, and bade me perform the

ceremony of adoration. This I did, and the veil of the goddess glittered in the darkness -- for night had fallen by this -- with a strange starry light.

Thereby it was known that I was indeed chosen aright.

So last of all they took me to the banqueting-house and set me on the high throne. One by one the priests came by and kissed my lips: one by one the priestesses came by, and gave me the secret clasp of hands that hath hidden virtue. And the banquet waxed merry; for all the food was magically prepared. Every beast that they slew was virgin; every plant that they plucked had been grown and tended by virgins in the gardens of the temple. Also the wine was spring water only, but so consecrated by the holy priestesses that one glass was more intoxicating than a whole skin of common wine. Yet this intoxication was a pure delight, an enthusiasm wholly divine; and it gave strength, and did away with sleep, and left no sorrow.

Last, as the first gray glow of Hormakhu paled the deep indigo of the night, they crowned and clothed me with white lotus flowers, and took me joyously back into the temple, there to celebrate the matin ritual of awakening the Veiled One.

Thus, and not otherwise, I became priestess of that holy goddess, and for a little while my life passed calm as the unruffled mirror itself.

It was from the Veiled One herself that came the Breath of Change.

On this wise.

In the Seventh Equinox after my initiation into her mystery the High Priestess was found to fail; at her invocation the Veil no longer glittered as was its wont. For this they deemed her impure, and resorted to many ceremonies, but without avail. At last in despair she went to the temple of Set, and gave herself as a victim to that dreadful god. Now all men were much disturbed at this, and it was not known at all of them what they should do. {309}

Now it must be remembered that the ceremonies are always performed by a single priestess alone before the goddess, save only at the Initiations.

The others also had found themselves rejected of her; and when they learnt of the terrible end of the High Priestess, they became fearful. Some few, indeed, concealed their failure from the priests; but always within a day and a night they were found torn asunder in the outer courts; so that it seemed the lesser evil to speak truth.

Moreover, the affair had become a public scandal; for the goddess plagued the people with famine and with a terrible and foul disease.

But as for me, I wot not what to do; for to me always the Veil glittered, and that brighter than the ordinary. Yet I said nothing, but went about drooping and sorrowful, as if I were as unfortunate as they. For I would not seem to boast of the favour of the goddess.

Then they sent to the old Magus in the well; and he laughed outright at their beads, and would say no word. Also they sent to the sacred goat of Khem, and his priestess would but answer, "I, and such as I, may be favoured of Her," which they took for ribaldry and mocking. A third time they sent to the temple of Thoth the Ibis god of wisdom. And Thoth answered them by this riddle: "On how many legs doth mine Ibis stand?"

And they understood him not.

But the old High priest determined to solve the mystery, though he paid forfeit with his life. So concealing himself in the temple, he watched in the pool for the reflection of the glittering of the Veil, while one by one we performed the {310} adorations. And behind him and without stood the priests, watching for him to make a sign. This we knew not; but when it fell to me (the last) to adore that Veiled One, behold! the Veil glittered, and the old Priest threw up his arms to signal that which had occurred. And the flash of the eye pierced the Veil, and he fell from his place dead upon the priests without.

They buried him with much honour, for that he had given his life for the people and for the temple, to bring back the favour of the Veiled One.

Then came they all very humbly unto me the child, and besought me to interpret the will of the Goddess. And her will was that I alone should serve her day and night.

Then they gave me to drink of the Cup of the torment; and this is its virtue, that if one should speak falsely, invoking the name of the goddess, he shall burn in hell visibly before all men for a thousand years; and that flame shall never be put out. There is such an one in her temple in Memphis, for I saw it with these eyes. There he burns and writhes and shrieks on the cold marble floor; and there he shall burn till his time expire, and he sink to that more dreadful hell below the West. But I drank thereof, and the celestial dew stood shining on my skin, and a coolness ineffable thrilled through me; whereat they all rejoiced, and obeyed the voice of the Goddess that I had declared unto them.

Now then was I alway alone with that Veiled One, and I must enter most fully into that secret period of my life. For, despite its ending, which hath put many wise men to shame, it was to me even as an eternity of rapture, of striving and of attainment beyond that which most mortals -- and they initiates even! -- call divine.

Now first let it be understood what is the ritual of adoration of our Lady the Veiled One.

First, the priestess performs a mystical dance, by which all beings whatsoever, be they dogs or demons, are banished, so that the place may be pure. Next, in another dance, even more secret and sublime, the presence of the goddess is invoked into her Image. Next, the priestess goes a certain journey, passing the shrines of many great and terrible of the Lords of Khem, and saluting them. Last, she assumes the very self of the Goddess; and if this be duly done, the Veil glittereth responsive.

Therefore, if the Veil glittereth not, one may know that in some way the priestess hath failed to identify herself with Her. Thus an impurity in the thought of the priestess must cause her to fail; for the goddess is utterly pure.

Yet the task is alway difficult; for with the other gods one knoweth the appearance of their images; and steadily contemplating these one can easily attain to their imitation, and so to their comprehension, and to unity of consciousness with them. But with Our Veiled One, none who hath seen her face hath lived long enough to say one word, or call one cry.

So then it was of vital urgency to me to keep in perfect sympathy with that pure soul, so calm, so strong. With what terror then did I regard myself when, looking into my own soul, I saw no longer that perfect stillness. Strange was it, even as if one should see a lake stirred by a wind that one did not feel upon the cheeks and brow!

Trembling and ashamed, I went to the vesper adoration. I knew myself troubled, irritated, by I knew not what. And in spite of all my efforts, this persisted even to the supreme moment of my assumption of her godhead.

And then? Oh but the Veil glittered as never yet; yea more! it shot out sparks of scintillant fire, silvery rose, a shower of flame and of perfume.

Then was I exceedingly amazed because of this, and made a Vigil before her all the night, seeking a Word. And that word came not.

Now of what further befell I will write anon.

CHAPTER IV

SO it came to pass that I no longer went out at all from the presence of the goddess, save only to eat and to sleep. And the favour of her was restored to the people, so that all men were glad thereof.

For if any man murmured, he was slain incontinent, the people being mindful of the famine and the disease, and being minded to have no more of such, if it could by any means be avoided. They were therefore exceeding punctual with their gifts.

But I was daily more afraid, being in a great sweat of passion, of which I dared to speak to no man. Nor did I dare to speak even privily in mine own heart thereof, lest I should discover its nature. But I sent my favourite, the virgin Istarah (slim, pallid, and trembling as a young lotus in the West Wind), with my ring of office, to enquire of the old Magus of the well.

And he answered her by pointing upward to the sky and then downward to the earth. And I read this Oracle as if it were spoken "As above, so beneath." This came to me as I had flung myself in despair at the feet of my Lady, covering them with my tears; for by a certain manifest token I now knew that I had done a thing that was so dreadful that even now -- these many thousand years hence -- I dare hardly write it.

I loved the Veiled One.

Yea, with the fierce passion of a beast, of a man, of a god, with my whole soul I loved her.

Even as I knew this by the manifest token the Veil burst into a devouring flame; it ate up the robes of my office, lapping them with its tongues of fire like a tigress lapping blood; yet withal it burnt me not, nor singed one hair.

Thus naked I fled away in fear, and in my madness slipped and fell into the pool of liquid silver, splashing it all over the hall; and even as I fled that rosy cataract of flame that wrapt me (from the Veil as it jetted) went out --- went out ----

The Veil was a dull web of gold, no more.

Then I crept fearfully to the feet of the goddess, and with my tears and kisses sought to wake her into life once more. But the Veil flamed not again; only a mist gathered about it and filled the temple, and hid all things from my eyes.

Now then came Istarah my favourite back with the ring and the message; and thinking that she brought bad news, I slit her lamb's-throat with the magic sickle, and her asp's-tongue I tore out with my hands, and threw it to the dogs and jackals.

Herein I erred sorely, for her news was good. Having reflected thereon, I perceived its import.

For since the Veil flamed always at my assumption, it was sure that I was in sympathy with that holy Veiled One.

If I were troubled, and knew not why; if my long peace were stirred -- why then, so She!

"As above, so beneath!" For even as I, being man, sought to grasp godhead and crush it in my arms, so She, the pure essence, sought to manifest in form by love.

Yet I dared not repeat the ceremony at midnight.

Instead I lay prone, my arms outstretched in shame and pain, on the steps at her feet.

And lo! the Veil flamed. Then I knew that She too blamed Herself alike for her ardour and for her abstinence. Thus seven days I lay, never stirring; and all that time the Veil flamed subtly and softly, a steady bluish glow changing to green as my thought changed from melancholy to desire.

Then on the eight day I rose and left the shrine and clad myself in new robes, in robes of scarlet and gold, with a crown of vine and bay and laurel and cypress. Also I purified myself and proclaimed a banquet. And I made the priests and the citizens, exceeding drunken. Then I called the guard, and purged thoroughly the whole temple of all of them, charging the captain on his life to let no man pass within. So that I should be absolutely alone in the whole precincts of the temple.

Then like an old gray wolf I wandered round the outer court, lifting up my voice in a mournful howl. And an ululation as of one hundred thousand wolves answered me, yet deep and muffled, as though it came from the very bowels of the earth.

Then at the hour of midnight I entered again the shrine and performed the ritual.

As I went on I became inflamed with an infinite lust for the Infinite; and now I let it leap unchecked, a very lion. Even so the Veil glowed red as with some infernal fire. Now then I am come to the moment of the Assumption; but instead of sitting calm and cold, remote, aloof, I gather myself together, and spring madly at the Veil, catching it in my two hands. Now the Veil was of woven gold, three thousand twisted wires; a span thick! Yet I put out my whole force to tear it across; and (for she also put out her force) it rent with a roar as of earthquake. Blinded I was with the glory of her face; I should have fallen; but she caught me to her, and fixed her divine mouth on mine, eating me up with the light of her eyes. Her mouth moaned, her throat sobbed with love; her tongue thrust itself into me as a shaft of sunlight smites into the palm-groves; my robes fell shrivelled, and flesh to flesh we clung. Then in some strange way she gripped me body and soul, twining herself about me and within me even as Death that devoureth mortal man.

Still, still my being increased; my consciousness expanded until I was all Nature seen as one, felt as one, apprehended as one, formed by me, part of me, apart from me -- all these things at one moment -- and at the same time the ecstasy of love grew colossal, a tower to scale the stars, a sea to drown the sun ...

I cannot write of this ... but in the streets people gathered apples of gold that dropped from invisible boughs, and invisible porters poured out wine for all, strange wine that healed disease and old age, wine

that, poured between the teeth of the dead (so long as the embalmer had not begun his work), brought them back from the dark kingdom to perfect health and youth.

As for me, I lay as one dead in the arms of the holy Veiled One -- Veiled no more! -- while she took her pleasure of me ten times, a thousand times. In that whirlwind of passion all my strength was as a straw in the simoom.

Yet I grew not weaker but stronger. Though my ribs cracked, I held firm. Presently indeed I stirred; it seemed as if her strength had come to me. Thus I forced back her head and thrust myself upon and into her even as a comet that impales the sun upon its horn! And my breath came fast between my lips and hers; her moan now faint, like a dying child, no more like a wild beast in torment.

Even so, wild with the lust of conquest, I urged myself upon her and fought against her. I stretched out her arms and forced them to the ground; then I crossed them on her breast, so that she was powerless. And I became like a mighty serpent of flame, and wrapt her, crushed her in my coils.

I was the master! ...

Then grew a vast sound about me as of shouting: I grew conscious of the petty universe, the thing that seems apart from oneself, so long as one is oneself apart from it.

Men cried "The temple is on fire! The temple of Asi the Veiled One is burning! The mighty temple that gave its glory to Thebai is aflame!

Then I loosed my coils and gathered myself together into the form of a mighty hawk of gold and spake one last word to her, a word to raise her from the dead!

But lo! not Asi, but Asar!

White was his garment, starred with red and blue and yellow. Green was his Countenance, and in his hands he bore the crook and scourge. Thus he rose, even as the temple fell about us in ruins, and we were left standing there.

And I wist not what to say.

Now then the people of the city crowded in upon us, and for the most part would have slain me.

But Thoth the mighty God, the wise one, with his Ibis-head, {318} and his nemyss of indigo, with his Ateph crown and his Phoenix wand and with his Ankh of emerald, with his magic apron in the Three colours; yea, Thoth, the God of Wisdom, whose skin is of tawny orange as though it burned in a furnace, appeared visibly to all of us. And the old Magus of the Well, whom no man had seen outside his well for nigh threescore years, was found in the midst: and he cried with a loud voice, saying:

"The Equinox of the Gods!"

And he went on to explain how it was that Nature should no longer be the centre of man's worship, but Man himself, man in his suffering and death, man in his purification and perfection. And he recited the Formula of the Osiris as follows, even as it hath been transmitted unto us by the Brethren of the Cross and Rose unto this day:

"For Asar Un-nefer hath said:

He that is found perfect before the Gods hath said:

These are the elements of my body, perfected through suffering,
glorified through trial.

For the Scent of the dying rose is the repressed sigh of my suffering;

The Flame-Red fire is the energy of my undaunted Will;

The Cup of Wine is the outpouring of the blood of my heart, sacrificed
to regeneration;

And the Bread and Salt are the Foundations of my Body

Which I destroy in order that they may be renewed.

For I am Asar triumphant, even Asar Un-nefer the Justified One!

I am He who is clothed with the body of flesh,

Yet in Whom is the Spirit of the mighty Gods.

I am the Lord of Life, triumphant over death; he who partaketh with me
shall arise with me.

I am the manifestor in Matter of those whose abode is in the Invisible.

I am purified: I stand upon the Universe: I am its Reconciler with the
eternal Gods: I am the Perfector of Matter; and without me the
Universe is not!"

All this he said, and displayed the sacraments of Osiris before them all; and in a certain mystical manner did we all symbolically partake of them. But for me! in the Scent of the dying Rose I beheld rather the perfection of the love of my lady the Veiled One, whom I had won, and slain in the winning!

Now, however, the old Magus clad me (for I was yet naked) in the dress of a Priest of Osiris. He gave me the robes of white Linen, and the leopard's skin, and the wand and ankh. Also he gave me the crook and scourge, and girt me with the royal girdle. On my head he set the holy Uraeus serpent for a crown; and then, turning to the people, cried aloud:

"Behold the Priest of Asar in Thebai!

"He shall proclaim unto ye the worship of Asar; see that ye follow him!"

Then, ere one could cry "Hold!" he had vanished from our sight.

I dismissed the people; I was alone with the dead God; with Osiris, the Lord of Amennti, the slain of Typhon, the devoured of Apophis ...

Yea, verily, I was alone!

CHAPTER V

NOW then the great exhaustion took hold upon me, and I fell at the feet of the Osiris as one dead. All knowledge of terrestrial things was gone from me; I entered the kingdom of the dead by the gate of the West. For the worship of Osiris is to join the earth to the West; it is the cultus of the Setting Sun. Through Isis man obtains strength of nature; through Osiris he obtains the strength of suffering and ordeal, and as the trained athlete is superior to the savage, so is the magic of Osiris stronger than the magic of Isis. So by my secret practices at night, while my guardians strove to smooth my spirit to a girl's, had I found the power to bring about that tremendous event, an Equinox of the Gods.

Just as thousands of years later was my secret revolt against Osiris -- for the world had suffered long enough! -- destined to bring about another Equinox in which Horus was to replace the Slain One with his youth and vigour and victory.

I passed therefore into these glowing abodes of Amennti, clad in thick darkness, while my body lay entranced at the feet of the Osiris in the ruined temple.

Now the god Osiris sent forth his strange gloom to cover us, lest the people should perceive or disturb; Therefore I lay peacefully entranced, and abode in Amennti. There I confronted the devouring god, and there was my heart weighed {321} and found perfect; there the two-and-forty Judges bade me pass through the pylons they guarded; there I spoke with the Seven, and with the Nine, and with the Thirty-Three; and at the end I came out into the abode of the Holy Hathor, unto her mystical mountain, and being there crowned and garlanded I rejoiced exceedingly, coming out through the gate of the East, the Beautiful gate, unto the Land of Khemi, and the city of Thebai, and the temple that had been the temple of the Veiled One. There I rejoined my body, making the magical links in the prescribed manner, and rose up and did adoration to the Osiris by the fourfold sign. Therefore the Light of Osiris began to dawn; it went about the city whirling forth, abounding, crying aloud; whereat the people worshipped, being abased with exceeding fear. Moreover, they hearkened unto their wise men and brought gifts of gold, so that the temple floor was heaped high; and gifts of oxen, so that the courts of the temple could not contain them: and gifts of slaves, as it were a mighty army.

Then I withdrew myself; and taking counsel with the wisest of the priests and of the architects and of the sculptors, I gave out my orders so that the temple might duly be builded. By the favour of the god all things went smoothly enough; yet was I conscious of some error in the working; or if you will, some weakness in myself and my desire. Look you, I could not forget the Veiled One, my days of silence and solitude with Her, the slow dawn of our splendid passion, the climax of all that wonder in her ruin!

So as the day approached for the consecration of the temple I began to dread some great catastrophe. Yet all went well -- perhaps too well.

The priests and the people knew nothing of this, however. For the god manifested exceptional favour; as a new god must do, or how shall he establish his position? The harvest were fourfold, the cattle eightfold;

the women were all fertile -- yea! barren women of sixty years bore twins! -- there was no disease or sorrow in the city.

Mighty was the concourse of the citizens on the great day of the consecration.

Splendid rose the temple, a fortress of black granite. The columns were carved with wonderful images of all the gods adoring Osiris; marvels of painting glittered on the walls; they told the story of Osiris, of his birth, his life, his death at the hands of Typhon, the search after his scattered members, the birth of Horus and Harpocrates, the vengeance upon Typhon Seth, the resurrection of Osiris.

The god himself was seated in a throne set back unto the wall. It was of lapis-lazuli and amber, it was inlaid with emerald and ruby. Mirrors of polished gold, of gold burnished with dried poison of asps, so that the slaves who worked upon it might die. For, it being unlawful for those mirrors to have ever reflected any mortal countenance, the slaves were both blinded and veiled; yet even so, it were best that they should die.

At last the ceremony began. With splendid words, with words that shone like flames, did I consecrate all that were there present, even the whole city of Thebai.

And I made the salutation unto the attendant gods, very forcibly, so that they responded with echoes of my adoration. And Osiris accepted mine adoration with gladness as I journeyed about at the four quarters of the temple.

Now cometh the mysterious ceremony of Assumption. I took upon myself the form of the god: I strove to put my heart in harmony with his.

Alas! alas! I was in tune with the dead soul of Isis; my heart was as a flame of elemental lust and beauty; I could not -- I could not. Then the heavens lowered and black clouds gathered upon the Firmament of Nu. Dark flames of lightning rent the clouds, giving no light. The thunder roared; the people were afraid. In his dark shrine the Osiris gloomed, displeasure on his forehead, insulted majesty in his eyes. Then a pillar of dust whirled down from the vault of heaven, even unto me as I stood alone, half-defiant, in the midst of the temple while the priests and the people cowered and wailed afar off. It rent the massy roof as it had been a thatch of straw, whirling the blocks of granite far away into the Nile. It descended, roaring and twisting, like a wounded serpent demon-king in his death-agony; it struck me and lifted me from the temple; it bore me through leagues of air into the desert; then it dissolved and flung me contemptuously on a hill of sand. Breathless and dazed I lay, anger and anguish tearing at my heart.

I rose to swear a mighty curse; exhaustion took me, and I fell in a swoon to the earth.

When I came to myself it was nigh dawn. I went to the top of the hillock and looked about me. Nothing but sand, sand all ways. Just so was it within my heart!

The only guide for my steps (as the sun rose) was a greener glimpse in the East, which I thought might be the valley of the Nile reflected. Thither I bent my steps: all day I struggled with the scorching heat, the shifting sand. At night I tried to sleep, for sheer fatigue impelled me. But as often as I lay down, so often restlessness impelled me forward. I would stagger on awhile, then stumble and fall. Only at dawn I slept perhaps for an hour, and woke chilled to death by my own sweat. I was so weak that I could hardly raise a hand; my tongue was swollen, so that I could not greet the sun-disk with the accustomed adoration. My brain had slipped control; I could no longer even think of the proper spells that might have brought me aid. Instead, dreadful shapes drew near; one, a hideous camel-demon, an obscene brute of filth; another, a black ape with a blue muzzle and crimson buttocks, all his skin hairless and scabby, with his mass of

mane oiled and trimmed like a beautiful courtesan's. This fellow mocked me with the alluring gestures of such an one, and anon voided his excrement upon me. Moreover there were others, menacing and terrible, vast cloudy demon-shapes. ...

I could not think of the words of power that control them.

Now the sun that warmed my chill bones yet scorched me further. My tongue so swelled that I could hardly breathe; my face blackened; my eyes bulged out. The fiends came closer; drew strength from my weakness, made themselves material bodies, twitched me and spiked me and bit me. I turned on them and struck feebly again and again; but they evaded me easily and their yelling laughter rang like hell's in my ears. Howbeit I saw that they attacked me only on one side, as if to force me to one path. But I was wise enough to keep my shadow steadily behind me: and they, seeing this, were all the more enraged: I therefore the more obstinate in my course. Then they changed their tactics; and made as if to keep me in the course I had chosen; and seeing this, I was confirmed therein.

Truly with the gods I went! for in a little while I came to a pool of water and a tall palm standing by.

I plunged in that cool wave; my strength came back, albeit slowly; yet with one wave of my hand in the due gesture the fiends all vanished; and in an hour I was sufficiently restored to call forth my friends from the pool -- the little fishes my playmates -- and the nymph of the pool came forth and bowed herself before me and cooked me the fishes with that fire that renders water luminous and sparkling. Also she plucked me dates from the tree, and I ate thereof. Thus was I much comforted; and when I had eaten, she took my head upon her lap, and sang me to sleep; for her voice was like the ripple of the lakes under the wind of spring and like the bubbling of a well and like the tinkling of a fountain through a bed of moss. Also she had deep notes like the sea that booms upon a rocky shore.

So long, long, long I slept.

Now when I awoke the nymph had gone; but I took from my bosom a little casket of certain sacred herbs; and casting a few grains into the pool, repaid her for her courtesy. And I blessed her in the name of our dead lady Isis, and went on in the strength of that delicious meal for a great way. Yet I wist not what to do; for I was as it were a dead man, although my age was barely two and twenty years.

What indeed should befall me?

Yet I went on; and, climbing a ridge, beheld at last the broad Nile, and a shining city that I knew not.

There on the ridge I stood and gave thanks to the great gods of Heaven, the Aeons of infinite years, that I had come thus far. For at the sight of Nilus new life began to dawn in me.

CHAPTER VI

WITHOUT any long delay I descended the slopes and entered the city. Not knowing what might have taken place in Thebai and what news might have come thither, I did not dare declare myself; but seeking out the High Priest of Horus I showed him a certain sign, telling him that I was come from Memphis on a journey, and intended to visit Thebai to pay homage at the shrine of Isis. But he, full of the news, told me that the ancient priestess of Isis, who had become priest of Osiris, had been taken up to heaven as a sign of the signal favour of the God. Whereat I could hardly hold myself from laughter; yet I controlled myself and answered that I was not prepared to return to Memphis, for that I was vowed to Isis, and Osiris could not serve my turn.

At this he begged me to stay as his guest, and to go worship at the temple of Isis in this city. I agreed thereto, and the good man gave me new robes and jewels from the treasury of his own temple. There too I rested sweetly on soft cushions fanned by young boys with broad leaves of palm. Also he sent me the dancing girl of Sleep. It was the art of this girl to weave such subtle movements that the sense, watching her, swooned; and as she swayed she sang, ever lower and lower as she moved slower and slower, until the looker-listener was dissolved in bliss of sleep and delicate dream.

Then as he slept she would bend over him even as Nuit the Lady of the Stars that bendeth over the black earth, and in his ears she would whisper strange rhythms, secret utterances, whereby his spirit would be rapt into the realms of Hathor or some other golden goddess, there in one night to reap an harvest of refreshment such as the fields of mortal sleep yield never.

So then I woke at dawn, to find her still watching, still looking into my eyes with a tender smile on her mouth that cooed whispers infinitely soothing. Indeed with a soft kiss she waked me, for in this Art there is a right moment to sleep, and another to waken: which she was well skilled to divine.

I rose then -- she flitted away like a bird -- and robed myself; and, seeking my host, went forth with him to the Temple of Isis.

Now their ritual (it appeared) differed in one point from that to which I was accustomed. Thus, it was not death to intrude upon the ceremony save only for the profane. Priests of a certain rank of initiation might if they pleased behold it. I, therefore, wishing to see again that marvellous glowing of the Veil, disclosed a sufficient sign to the High Priest. Thereat was he mightily amazed; and, from the foot judging Hercules, began to think that I might be some sacred envoy or inspector from the Gods themselves. This I allowed him to think; meanwhile we went forward into the shrines and stood behind the pillars, unseen, in the prescribed position.

Now it chanced that the High Priestess herself had this day chosen to perform the rite.

This was a woman tall and black, most majestic, with limbs strong as a man's. Her gaze was hawk-keen, and her brow commanding. But at the Assumption of the God-form she went close and whispered into the Veil, so low that we could not hear it; but as it seemed with fierce intensity, with some passion that knotted up her muscles, so that her arms writhed like wounded snakes. Also the veins of her forehead swelled, and foam came to her lips. We thought that she had died; her body swelled and shuddered; last of all a terrible cry burst from her throat, inarticulate, awful.

Yet all this while the Veil glittered, though something sombrely. Also the air was filled with a wild sweeping music, which rent our very ears with its uncouth magic. For it was like no music that I had ever heard before. At last the Priestess tore herself away from the Veil and reeled -- as one drunken -- down the temple. Sighs and sobs tore her breast; and her nails made bloody grooves in her wet flanks.

On a sudden she espied me and my companion; with one buffet she smote him to earth -- it is unlawful to resist the Priestess when she is in the Ecstasy of Union -- and falling upon me, like a wild beast she buried her teeth in my neck, bearing me to the ground. Then, loosing me, while the blood streamed from me, she fixed her glittering eyes upon it with strange joy, and with her hands she shook me as a lion shakes a buck. Sinewy were her hands, with big knuckles, and the strength of her was as cords of iron. Yet her might was but a mortal's; in a little she gave one gasp like a drowning man's; her body slackened, and fell with its dead weight on mine, her mouth glued to mine in one dreadful kiss. Dreadful; for as my mouth returned it, almost mechanically, the blood gushed from her nostrils and blinded me. I too, then, more dead than alive, swooned into bliss, into trance. I was awakened by the High Priest of Horus. "Come," he said; "she is dead." I disengaged myself from all that weight of madness -- and the body

writhed convulsively as I turned it over -- I kissed those frothy lips, for in death she was beautiful beyond belief, joyous beyond description -- thence I staggered to the Veil, and saluted with all my strength, so that it glittered under the force of my sheer will. Then I turned me again, and with the High Priest sought his house.

Strange indeed was I as I went through the city, my new robes dark with blood of that most holy sorceress.

But no one of the people dared so much as lift his eyes; nor spoke we together at all. But when we were come into the house of the High Priest, sternly did he confront me.

"What is this, my son?"

And I weary of the folly of the world and of the uselessness of things answered him:

"Father, I go back to Memphis. I am the Magus of the Well."

Now he knew the Magus, and answered me:

"Why liest thou?"

And I said "I am come into the world where all speech is false, and all speech is true."

Then he did me reverence, abasing himself unto the ground even unto nine-and-ninety times.

And I spurned him and said, "Bring forth the dancing girl of Sleep; for in the morning I will away to Memphis."

And she came forth, and I cursed her and cried: "Be thou the dancing girl of Love!"

And it was so. And I went in unto her, and knew her; and in the morning I girded myself, and boarded the state barge of the High Priest, and pillowed myself upon gold and purple, and disported myself with lutes and with lyres and with parrots, and with black slaves, and with wine and with delicious fruits, until I came even unto the holy city of Memphis.

And there I called soldiers of Pharaoh, and put cruelly to death all them that had accompanied me; and I burnt the barge, adrift upon the Nile at sunset, so that the flames alarmed the foolish citizens. All this I did, and danced naked in my madness through the city, until I came to the Old Magus of the Well.

And laughing, I threw a stone upon him, crying: "Ree me the riddle of my life!"

And he answered naught.

Then I threw a great rock upon him, and I heard his bones crunch, and I cried in mockery: "Ree me the riddle of "thy" life!"

But he answered naught.

Then I threw down the wall of the well; and I burned the house with fire that stood thereby, with the men-servants and the maid-servants.

And none dared stay me; for I laughed and exulted in my madness. Yea, verily, I laughed, and laughed -- and laughed ---

CHAPTER VII

THEN being healed of my madness I took all the treasure of that old Magus which he had laid up for many years -- and none gainsaid me. Great and splendid was it of gold more than twelve bullocks could draw, of balassius rubies, and sardonyx, and beryl, and chrysoprase; of diamond and starry sapphire, of emerald much, very much, of topaz and of amethyst great and wonderful gems. Also he had a figure of Nuit greater than a woman, which was made of lapis lazuli specked with gold, carved with marvellous excellence. And he had the secret gem of Hadit that is not found on earth, for that it is invisible save when all else is no more seen.

Then went I into the market and bought slaves. I bought me in particular a giant, a Nubian blacker than polished granite seen by starlight, tall as a young palm and straight, yet more hideous than the Ape of Thoth. Also I bought a young pale stripling from the North, a silly boy with idle languishing ways. But his mouth burned like sunset when the dust-storms blow. So pale and weak was he that all despised him and mocked him for a girl. Then he took a white-hot iron from the fire and wrote with it my name in hieroglyphics on his breast; nor did his smile once alter while the flesh hissed and smoked.

Thus we went out a great caravan to a rocky islet in the Nile, difficult of access for that the waters foamed and swirled dangerously about it. There we builded a little temple shaped like a beehive; but there was no altar and no shrine therein; for in that temple should the god be sacrificed unto himself.

Myself I made the god thereof; I powdered my hair with gold, and inwound it with flowers. I gilded my eyelids, and I stained my lips with vermilion. I gilded my breasts and my nails, and as God and Victim in one was I daily sacrificed unto that strange thing that was none other than myself. I made my giant Nubian high priest; and I endowed his wand with magic power, so that he might properly perform my rites. This he did to such purpose that many men from Memphis and even from more distant towns, leaving their gods, came thither, and did sacrifice. Then I appointed also the pale boy warder of the Sanctuary: and he swore unto me to be faithful unto death.

Now there arose a great strife in Memphis, and many foolish and lewd women cried out against us. So fierce was the uproar that a great company of women issued forth from the city and came into the island. They slew my pale boy at the gate, though sword in hand he fought against them. Then they frothed on, and I confronted them in my glory. They hesitated, and in that moment I smote them with a deadly itching, so that running forth they tore off their clothes and set themselves to scratching, while my people laughed until they ached.

At the term, indeed, with exhaustion and with loss of blood they died all; four hundred and two women perished in that great day's slaughter. So that the people of Memphis had peace for awhile.

But as for me, I mourned the loss of that young slave. I had his body embalmed as is not fitting for other than a king. And at the door of the temple I placed his sarcophagus beneath a hedge of knives and spears, so that there was no other access to my glory.

Like honour hath no slave had ever.

Thus then I abode three cycles of the season; and at the end of that time the high Priest died.

For mine was a strange and dreadful rite to do; none other, and none unfortified by magic power, could have done this thing.

Yet I too sickened of that everlasting sacrifice. I was become worn and wan; there was no blood but ice in my veins. I had indeed become all but a god ...

Therefore I took the body of my Nubian, and slew four young girls, and filled all the hollow spaces of his body with their blood. Then too I sealed up his body with eight seals; and the ninth seal was mine own, the centre of my godhead.

Then he rose slowly and staggeringly as I uttered the dreadful words:

A ka dua

Tuf ur biu

Bi aa chefu

Dudu ner af an nuteru!

Then I touched him with my wand and he rose into full power of his being; and we entered in, and for the last time did he preform (though silent) the ceremony. At whose end he lay shrivelled and collapsed, shrunken like an old wineskin; yet his blood availed me nothing. I was icier than before. Yet now indeed was I Osiris, for I sent out flames of cold gray glory from my skin, and mine eyes were rigid with ecstasy.

Yea, by Osiris himself, I swear it! Even as the eyes of all living men revolve ceaselessly, so were mine fixed!

Then I shook myself and went forth into the city of Memphis, my face being veiled and my steps led by slaves.

And there I went into the temples one by one; and I twitched aside my veil, whereat all men fell dead on the instant, and the gods tumbled from their places, and broke in pieces upon the floor.

And I veiled myself, and went into the market-place and lifted up my voice in a chant and cried:

Death, and desolation, and despair!

I lift up my voice, and all the gods are dumb.

I unveil my face, and all that liveth is no more,

I sniff up life, and breathe forth destruction.

I hear the music of the world, and its echo is Silence.

Death, and desolation, and despair!

The parting of the ways is come: the Equinox of the Gods is past.

Another day: another way.

Let them that hear me be abased before me!

Death, and desolation, and despair!

Then I pulled away my veil, and the cold lightnings of death shot forth, and the people of the city fell dead where they stood.

Save only one, a young boy, a flute-player, that was blind, and, seeing not those eyes of mine, died not.

Then to him I spake, saying:

"Arise, summon the priests and the people, all that remain. And let them build a temple unto Osiris the God of the dead, and let the dead be worshipped for ever and ever."

This I said, and went out from the city with the two slaves that I had left in the gate, and we went unto Nile, unto a cave by the bank of the river; and there I abode for many months, weeping for Isis my Lady. For though I had avenged her in many dreadful deeds, yet I brought her not back unto life. Moreover the love of her was as it were dead in me, so that my heart stirred not at the thought of her. Say that my love wandered like a ghost unburied, frozen, adrift upon the winds!

Now of my deeds at this period it is almost too horrible to tell. For I performed great penance, in the hope of vitalizing that dead principle in me which men call the soul.

I starved myself shamefully, in this manner. First surrounding myself with all possible luxuries of food, brought in steaming and savoury from hour to hour, I yet condemned myself to subsist upon a little garlic and a little salt, with a little water in which oats had been bruised.

Then if any wish arose in me to eat of the dainties around me I gashed myself with a sharp stone.

Moreover I kindled a great fire in the cave so that the slaves stumbled and fainted as they approached. And the smoke choked me so that I constantly vomited a black and ill-smelling mucus from my lungs, stained here and there with frothing blood.

Again, I suffered my hair to grow exceeding long, and therein I harboured vermin. Also, when I lay down to sleep, though this I did not till with swollen tongue and blackened throat I could no longer howl the name of my dead Lady, then (I say) did I smear my limbs with honey, that the rats of the cave might gnaw them as I slept. Moreover, I pillowed mine head upon a corpse dead of leprosy, and whenever that dead soul of mine stirred at all with love toward my Lady, then I caressed and kissed that corpse, and sang soft songs to it, playing with gracious words and gestures. All this spoke loudly to my soul, rebuking it for its weakness and corruption. So too the bitterness and foulness of my life would often overleap the limit of sensibility; and then for hours together would I be lost in a raging whirlwind of laughter. At this time my slaves would be afraid to come anigh me, and then darting out of the cave I would catch one by the hair and dragging him within put him to exquisite torture. This indeed was of great use to me; for I would devise atrocious things, and if they served to excite his utmost anguish I would then try them on myself. Thus I would run needles steeped in Nile mud beneath my finger-vails, so that the sores festering might produce a sickening agony. Or again I would cut strips of skin and tear them off; but this failed, though it acted well enough upon the slave, for my own skin had become too brittle. Then I would take a piece of hard wood, and hammer it with a stone against the bones, hurting the membrane that covers them, and

causing it to swell. This too I had to abandon, for the limb of the slave died, and he swelled up and rotted and turned green, and in shocking agony he died.

So then I was compelled to cure myself magically, and this was a great loss of force.

Yet was I "Far from the Happy Ones," although my lips hung on my fleshless face like bean-pods withered and blackened, and although there was not one inch of skin upon all my body that was not scarred.

Yet my trial was nigh its end. For the people of Memphis, wondering at the frequent purchases of dead lepers made always by the same slave, began, as is the wont of the ignorant, to spread foolish rumours. At last they said openly "there is an holy hermit in the old cave by Nile." Then the barren women of the city came out stealthily to me in the hope that by my sanctity their dry sticks might blossom.

But I showed them my dead leper, and said "Let me first beget children upon this, and after I will do your business." This liked them not; yet they left me not alone, for they went home and cried out that I was an horror, a ghoul, a vampire. ... And at that all the young and beautiful women of the city, leaving their lovers and their husbands, flocked to me, bringing gifts. But I took them to the dead leper and said, "When you are beautiful as that is beautiful, and when I am weary of its beauty and its delight, then will I do your pleasure."

Then they all raged vehemently against me, and stirred up the men of the city to destroy me. And I, not being minded to display my magic force, went by night (so soon as I heard of this) and took sanctuary in the shrine of Osiris that I had caused them to build. And there I attained felicity; for uniting my consciousness with the god's, I obtained the expansion of that consciousness. Is not the kingdom of the dead a mighty kingdom?

So I perceived the universe as it were a single point of infinite nothingness yet of infinite extension; and becoming this universe, I became dissolved utterly therein. Moreover, my body lifted itself up and rose in the air to a great height beyond the shadow of the earth, and the earth rolled beneath {338} me; yet of all this I knew nothing, for that I was all these things and none of them. Moreover I was united with Isis the Mother of Osiris, being yet her brother and her lord.

Woe, woe to me! for all this was but partial and imperfect; nor did I truly understand that which occurred.

Only this I knew, that I should return to my city of Thebai, and rule therein as High Priest of Osiris, no longer striving to some end unheard-of or impossible, but quietly and patiently living in the enjoyment of my dignities and wealth, even as a man.

Yet one thing I saw also, that as Isis is the Lady of all Nature, the living; and as Osiris is the Lord of the Dead, so should Horus come, the Hawk-headed Lord, as a young child, the image of all Nature and all Man raised above Life and Death, under the supreme rule of Hadit that is Force and of Nuit that is Matter -- though they are a Matter and a Force that transcend all our human conceptions of these things.

But of this more anon, in its due place.

CHAPTER VIII

BEHOLD me then returned to Thebai! So scarred and altered was I, though not yet thirty years of age, that they knew me not. So I offered myself as a serving-man in the temple of Osiris, and I pleased the

priests mightily, for by my magic power -- though they thought it to be natural -- I sang songs unto the god, and made hymns. Therefore in less than a year they began to speak of initiating me into the priesthood. Now the High Priest at this time was a young and vigorous man, black-bearded in the fashion of Osiris, with a single square tuft beneath the chin. Him had they chosen after my departure in the whirlwind. And the High Priestess was a woman of forty and two years old, both dark and beautiful, with flashing eyes and stern lips. Yet her body was slim and lithe like that of a young girl. Now, as it chanced, it was my turn to serve her with the funeral offerings; flesh of oxen and of geese, bread, and wine. And as she ate she spake with me; for she could see by her art that I was not a common serving-man. Then I took out the consecrated Wand of Khem that I had from my father; and I placed it in her hand. At that she wondered, for that Wand is the sign of a great and holy initiation: so rare that (as they say) no woman but one has ever attained unto it. Then she blessed herself that she had been permitted to look upon it, and prayed me to keep silence for a little while, for she had somewhat in her mind to do. And I lifted up the wand upon her in the nine-and-forty-fold benediction, and she received illumination thereof, and rejoiced. Then I fell at her feet -- for she was the High Priestess -- and kissed them reverently, and withdrew.

Then three days afterwards, as I learnt, she sent for a priestess who was skilled in certain deadly crafts and asked of her a poison. And she gave it, saying: "Let the High Priest of the God of the dead go down to the dead!" Then that wicked High Priestess conveyed unto him subtly the poison in the sacraments themselves, and he died thereof. Then by her subtlety she caused a certain youth to be made high priest who was slovenly and stupid, thinking in herself "Surely the god will reject him." But at his word the Image of the god glowed as was its wont. And at that she knew -- and we all knew -- that the glory was departed; for that the priests had supplanted the right ceremony by some trick of deceit and craft.

Thereat was she mightily cast down, for though wicked and ambitious, she had yet much power and knowledge.

But instead of using that power and that knowledge she sought to oppose craft with craft. And suspecting (aright) whose cunning had done this thing she bribed him to reverse the machinery, so that the High Priest might be shamed. But shamed he was not; for he lied, saying that the God glowed brighter than the Sun; and he lied securely, for Maat the Lady of Truth had no place in that temple. To such foulness was all fallen by my first failure to assume the god-form, and their priestly falsehood that my sanctity had rapt me into heaven. Nor had the wealth they lied to obtain availed them {341} aught; for Pharaoh had descended upon Thebai, and laid heavy hand upon the coffers of the temple, so that they were poor. Even, they sold good auguries for gold; and these were a very destruction to them that bought. Then they sold curses, and sowed discord in the city. Wherefore the people grew poorer still, and their gifts to the temple waxed even less.

For there is no foolishness like the hunger after gain.

Of old the gods had given blessing, and the people offered freely of their plenty.

Now the priests sowed chaff, and reaped but barrenness.

So I waited patiently in silence to see what might befall. And this foolish priestess could think of no better expedient than formerly. But this young stupid man had guessed how his predecessor was dead, and he touched not the sacraments; but feigned.

Then she called for me -- and I was now ordained priest -- to take counsel of me; for she was minded to put me in his place.

Thus she made a great banquet for me; and when we were well drunken she laid her head upon my breast and said marvellous things to me of love, to me, who had loved the Veiled One! But I feigned all the madness of passion and made her drunk thereon, so that she talked great words, frothing forth like dead fishes swollen in the sun, of how we should rule Thebai and (it might be) displace Pharaoh and take his throne and sceptre. Yet, foolish woman! she could not think how she might remove this stupid high priest, her own nominee! So I answered her "Assume the Form of Osiris, and all will be well in the Temple of Osiris." Mocking her, for I knew that she could not. Yet so drunken was she upon love and wine that there and then she performed the ritual of Adoration and Assumption.

Then I in merry mood put out my power, and caused her in truth to become Osiris, so that she went icy stark, and her eyes fixed. ...

Then she tried to shriek with fear, and could not; for I had put upon her the silence of the tomb.

But all the while I feigned wonder and applause, so that she was utterly deceived. And being tired of mocking her, I bade her return. This she did, and knew not what to say. At first she pretended to have received a great secret; then, knowing how much higher was my grade initiation, dared not. Then, at last, being frightened, she flung herself at my feet and confessed all, pleading that at least her love for me was true. This may well have been; in any case I would have had compassion upon her, for in sooth her body was like a flower, white and pure, though her mouth was heavy and strong, her eyes wrinkled with lust, and her cheeks flaccid with deceit.

So I comforted her, pressing her soft body in mine arms, drinking the wine of her eyes, feeding upon the honey of her mouth.

Then at last I counselled her that she should bid him to a secret banquet, and that I should serve them, disguised in my old dress as a serving-man.

On the next night after this he came, and I served them, and she made open love (though feigned) to him. Yet subtly, so that he thought her the deer and himself the lion. Then at last he went clean mad, and said: "I will give thee what thou wilt for one kiss of that thy marvellous mouth." Then she made him swear the oath by Pharaoh -- the which if he broke Pharaoh would have his head -- and she kissed him once, as if her passion were like the passion of Nile in flood for the sandy bars that it devoureth, and then leaping up, answered him, "give me thine office of High Priest for this my lover!" With that she took and fondled me. He gaped, aghast; then he took off the ring of office and flung it at her feet; he spat one word in her face; he slunk away.

But I, picking up the ring of office, cried after him: "What shall be done to who insulteth the High Priestess?"

And he turned and answered sullenly: "I was the High Priest." "Thou hadst no longer the ring!" she raged at him, her face white with fury, her mouth dripping the foam of her anger -- for the word was a vile word! ...

Then she smote upon the bell, and the guard appeared. At her order they brought the instruments of death, and summoned the executioner, and left us there. Then the executioner bound him to the wheel of iron by his ankles and his waist and his throat; and he cut off his eyelids, that he might look upon his death. Then with his shears he cut off the lips from him, saying, "With these lips didst thou blaspheme the Holy One, the Bride of Osiris." Then one by one he wrenched out the teeth of him, saying every time: "With this tooth didst thou frame a blasphemy against the Holy One, the Bride of Osiris." Then he pulled out the tongue with his pincers, saying: "With this tongue didst thou speak blasphemy against the Holy

One, the Bride of Osiris." Then took he a strong corrosive acid and blistered his throat therewith, saying: "From this throat didst thou blaspheme the Holy One, {344} the Bride of Osiris." Then he took a rod of steel, white-hot, and burnt away his secret parts, saying: "Be thou put to shame, who hast blasphemed the Holy One, the Bride of Osiris." After that, he took a young jackal and gave it to eat at his liver, saying: "Let the beasts that devour carrion devour the liver that lifted itself up to blaspheme the Holy One, the Bride of Osiris!" With that the wretch died, and they exposed his body in the ditch of the city, and the dogs devoured it.

Now all this while had my lady dallied amorously with me, making such sweet moan of love as never was, yet her face fixed upon his eyes who loved her, and there glared in hell's torment, the body ever striving against the soul which should exceed.

And, as I judge, but the favour of Set the soul gat mastery therein.

Also, though I write it now, coldly, these many thousand years afterward, never had I such joy of love of any woman as with her, and at that hour, so that as I write it I remember well across the mist of time every honey word she spoke, every witching kiss (our mouths strained sideways) that she sucked from my fainting lips, every shudder of her soft strong body. I remember the jewelled coils of hair, how they stung like adders as they touched me; the sharp rapture of her pointed nails pressing me, now velvet-soft, now capricious-cruel, now (love-maddened) thrust deep to draw blood, as they played up and down my spine. But I saw nothing; by Osiris I swear it! I saw nothing, save only the glare in the eyes of that lost soul that writhed upon the wheel.

Indeed, as the hangman took out the corpse, we fell back and lay there among the waste of the banquet, the flagons overturned, the napery awry, the lamps extinct or spilt, the golden cups, chased with obscene images, thrown here and there, the meats hanging over the edge of their bejewelled dishes, their juice staining the white luxury of the linen; and in the midst ourselves, our limbs as careless as the wind, motionless.

One would have said: the end of the world is come. But through all that fiery abyss of sleep wherein I was plunged so deep, still stirred the cool delight of the knowledge that I had won the hand for which I played, that I was High Priest of Osiris in Thebai.

But in the morning we rose and loathed each other, our mouths awry, our tongues hanging loose from their corners like thirsty dogs, our eyes blinking in agony from the torture of daylight, our limbs sticky with stale sweat.

Therefore we rose and saluted each other in the dignity of our high offices; and we departed one from the other, and purified ourselves.

Then I went unto the Ceremony of Osiris, and for the last time the shameful farce was played.

But in my heart I vowed secretly to cleanse the temple of its chicanery and folly. Therefore at the end of the ceremony did I perform a mighty banishing, a banishing of all things mortal and immortal, even from Nuit that circleth infinite Space unto Hadit the Core of Things; from Amoun that ruleth before all the Gods unto Python the terrible Serpent that abideth at the end of things, from Ptah the god of the pure soul of aethyr unto Besz the brute force of that which is grosser than earth, which hath no name, which is denser than {346} lead and more rigid than steel; which is blacker than the thick darkness of the abyss, yet is within all and about all.

Amen!

Then during the day I took counsel with myself, and devised a cunning to match the cunning of them that had blasphemed Osiris, who had at last become my God.

Yea! bitterly would I avenge him on the morrow.

CHAPTER IX

NOW this was the manner of my working, that I inspired the High Priestess to an Oracle, so that she prophesied, saying that Osiris should never be content with his servants unless they had passed the four ordeals of the elements. Now of old these rituals had been reserved for a special grade of initiation. The chapter was therefore not a little alarmed, until they remembered how shamefully all the true magic was imitated, so that the rumour went that this was but a device of the High Priestess to increase the reputation of the temple for sanctity. And, their folly confirming them in this, they agreed cheerfully and boasted themselves. Now then did I swathe them one by one in the grave-clothes of Osiris, binding upon the breast and image, truly consecrated, of the god, with a talisman against the four elements.

Then I set them one by one upon a narrow and lofty tower, balanced, so that the least breath of wind would blow them off into destruction.

Those whom the air spared I next threw into Nile where most it foams and races. Only a few the water gave back again. These, however, did I bury for three days in the earth without sepulchre or coffin, so that the element of earth might combat them. And the rare ones whom earth spared I cast upon a fire of charcoal. {348}

Now who is prepared for these ordeals (being firstly attuned to the elements) findeth them easy. He remains still, though the tempest rage upon the tower; in the water he floats easily and lightly; buried, he but throws himself into trance; and, lastly, his wrappings protect him against the fire, though all Thebai went to feed the blaze.

But it was not so with this bastard priesthood of Osiris. For of the three hundred only nine were found worthy. The High Priestess, however, I brought through by my magic, for she had amused me mightily, and I took great pleasure in her love, that was wilder than the rage of all the elements in one.

So I called together the nine who had survived, all being men, and gave them instruction and counsel, that they should form a secret brotherhood to learn and to teach the formula of the Osiris in its supreme function of initiating the human soul. That they should keep discipline in the temple only for the sake of the people, permitting every corruption yet withdrawing themselves from it. Is not the body perishable, and the skin most pure? So also the ancient practice of embalming should fall into desuetude, and that soon; for the world was past under the rule of Osiris, who loveth the charnel and the tomb.

All being sworn duly into this secret brotherhood I appointed them, one to preside over each grade, and him of the lowest grade to select the candidates and to govern the temple.

Then did I perform the invoking Ceremony of Osiris, having destroyed the blasphemous machinery; and now at last did the God answer me, glittering with infinite brilliance. Then I disclosed myself to the Priests, and they rejoiced exceedingly that after all those years the old lie was abolished, and the master come back to his own.

But the god uttered an Oracle, saying: "This last time shall I glitter with brilliance in My temple; for I am the god of Life in Death, concealed. Therefore shall your magic henceforth be a magic most secret in the

heart; and whoso shall perform openly any miracle, him shall ye know for a liar and a pretender to the sacred Wisdom.

"For this cause am I wrapped ever in a shroud of white starred with the three active colours; these things conceal Me, so that he who knoweth Me hath passed beyond them."

Then did the god call us each separately to him, and in each ear did he whisper a secret formula and a word of power, pertaining to the grade to which I had appointed him.

But to me he gave the supreme formula and the supreme word, the word that hath eight-and-seventy letters, the formula that hath five-and-sixty limbs.

So then I devoted myself there and then to a completer understanding of Osiris my God, so that I might discover his function in the whole course of the Cosmos.

For he that is born in the years of the power of a God thinketh that God to be eternal, one, alone. But he that is born in the hour of the weakness of the God, at the death of one and the birth of the other, seeth something (though it be little) of the course of things. And for him it is necessary to understand fully that change of office (for the gods neither die nor are re-born, but now one initiates and the other guards, and now one heralds and the other sanctifies) its purpose and meaning in the whole scheme of things.

So I, in this year V of the Equinox of the Gods (1908) wherein Horus took the place of Osiris, will by the light of this my magical memory seek to understand fully the formula of Horus -- Ra Hoor Khuit -- my god, that ruleth the world under Nuit and Hadit. Then as Ankh-f-na-khonsu left unto me the "stele" 666 with the keys to that knowledge, so also may I write down in hieroglyph the formula of the Lady of the Forked Wand and of the Feather, that shall assume his throne and place when the strength of Horus is exhausted.

So now the service of the Gods was to be secret and their magic concealed from men. They were to fall before the eyes of men from their place, and little sewer-rats were to come and mock at them, no man avenging them, and they utterly careless, not striking for themselves. Yet was there knowledge of them which an initiate might gain, though so much more difficult, immeasurably higher and more intimate.

My life from this moment became highly concentrated upon itself. I had no time either for ascetic practices or for any pleasures; nor would I take any active part in the service of the temple which, purified and regenerated, had become both subtly perfect and perfectly subtle.

It was not all of the people who did at all comprehend the change that had occurred; but the others obeyed and made believe to understand, lest their fellows should despise them. So it happened that the more ignorant and stupid any person was the more he feigned understanding; so that the least devout appeared the most devout -- as it is unto this day.

But for me all these things were as nothing; for I studied ever the nature of Osiris, concentrating myself into mysterious pure symbols. I understood why it was said that Isis had failed to discover the Phallus of Osiris, and thus perceived the necessity of Horus to follow him in the great succession of the Equinoxes. Moreover I fashioned talismans of pure light concerning Osiris, and I performed in light all the ceremonies of initiation into his mysteries.

These were interpreted by wise men and translated into the language of the twilight and graven on stone and in the memories of men.

Yet was I even more intrigued in that great struggle to apprehend the course of things, as it is seen from the standpoint of Destiny. So that I might leave true and intelligible images to enlighten the mind of him (whether myself or another) that should come after me to celebrate the Equinox of the Gods at the end of the period of Osiris.

As now hath come to pass.

Thus then three-and-thirty years I lived in the temple of Osiris a High Priest; and I subdued all men under me. Also I abolished the office of priestess, for had not Isis failed to find that venerable Phallus without which Osiris must be so melancholy a god?<<WEH NOTE: The last Priestess of Amen-Ra at Thebes was also the Priestess of Osiris at Abydos and of Isis and Horus at Panopolis. She was named Nesitanebtashru and lived circa 970 b.c.e. --- see Budge, "The Greenfield Papyrus in the British Museum.">> Therefore was Khemi to fall, and the world to be dark and sorrowful for many years.

Therefore I made mine High Priestess into a serving-maid, and with veiled face she served me all those many years, never speaking.

Yet they being accomplished, I thought fit to reward her. So magically I renewed about her the body of a young girl, and for a year she served me, unveiled and speaking at her pleasure.

And her time being come, she died.

Then I looked again into my destiny, and perceived that all my work was duly accomplished. Nor could any use or worth be found in my body.

So therefore I determined to accept my great reward, that was granted unto me as the faithful minister of the god F.I.A.T. that is behind all manifestation of Will and of Intelligence, of whom Isis and Osiris and Horus are but the ministers.

Of this, and of my death, I will speak on another occasion.

But first I will discourse of the inhabitants of the kingdom that encircleth the world, so that they who "fear" may be comforted.

CHAPTER X

BUT of these matters I am warned that I shall not now become aware, for that there be great mysteries therein contained, pertaining to a degree of initiation of which I am as yet unworthy.

("Thus the record comes abruptly to an end.")